

Research Highlights

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Study of Latino MSM shows multiple sex partners, inconsistent condom use

A recent study of Latino men who have sex with men living in urban areas of Virginia shows that inconsistent condom use and multiple sex partners are common. Young men and those with less education, who are attracted to women, who consider themselves to be bisexual, and who hold traditional "macho" beliefs are particularly at risk for HIV infection.

Latinos and HIV/AIDS

Recent statistics about HIV/AIDS show that Latinos are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS. Whereas 10 percent of the U.S. population is of Latino origin, they accounted for 18 percent of AIDS cases reported by mid-2000 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; June, 2000).

Men who have sex with men (MSM) also continue to be at risk. In Virginia by the end of 2000, 54.5% of men with HIV and 67.8% of men with AIDS were MSM. Given these statistics, Latino MSM at risk of contracting HIV constitute a group of growing concern in Virginia.

This report summarizes a study exploring the frequency of risk factors and the predictors of those factors among Latino MSM living in major urban areas in Virginia.

Study Design

In the summer and fall of 1999, surveys were collected from 291 Latino men in the Richmond, Hampton Roads (Norfolk, Virginia Beach

Newport News and Portsmouth), and Northern Virginia areas of Virginia. These areas constitute the state's major metropolitan areas and include the highest concentrations of Latinos in the state.

Data were gathered by four coordinators, all of them bilingual Latino MSM, residents of the areas in which they gathered data, experienced in HIV/AIDS prevention activities, and familiar with the Latino MSM populations in their areas.

To recruit respondents, coordinators contacted Latino organizations and other groups providing services to Latinos and went to locations attended by Latinos, such as clinics, group meetings such as AA, DWI counseling groups, immigration services workshops, work locations (such as construction sites) and public gatherings, (e.g., Gay Pride Day, soccer and baseball games). Snowball techniques were also used in which men recruited for the survey recruited others.

Many surveys were completed in home parties organized by the coordinators, each usually attended by 4-6 men. Questionnaires were completed either through group or individual administration. Respondents were given a T-shirt as a token of appreciation.

Project directed by Dr. S. Lisbeth Jarama;
This report written and designed by Dr. J. David Kenamer.

Sample Characteristics

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents lived in Northern Virginia, matching that region's predominance both in overall population and in Latino population. About a quarter lived in the Richmond area and the rest in Hampton Roads.

Most participants were between 30 and 40 years old with 30 being the average age. Education was higher than statistics usually show for Latinos. Eighty-five percent had at least a high school education, and nearly 70% had done technical training, attended some college, graduated from a four-year college, or done graduate study.

Despite these educational levels, income levels were fairly low. Nearly half earned less than \$1,500 per month.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents were immigrants born outside of the U.S. in one of the Latin American countries, especially in Northern Virginia where 96% were immigrants. Nearly half of the sample was from Central America.

Most respondents were permanent residents of the U.S., with only 14% indicating that they enter and leave the U.S. regularly to find work.

The majority of men reported being attracted only to men (61%) or mostly to men (24%); 10% said they were attracted to both men and women, while 5% said they were attracted only to women or mostly to women.

About two-thirds thought of themselves as gay or homosexual, 21% as bisexual, 11% as straight or heterosexual (despite their behavior), and 7% as transsexuals, transvestites, or "something else."

As Figure 1 shows, 16% said they had no sex partners in the three months prior to the survey, 32% said they had one sex partner; 52% said they had two or more partners.

The analyses described in the remainder of this report are based on the 250 MSM who reported at least one sex partner in the previous three months.

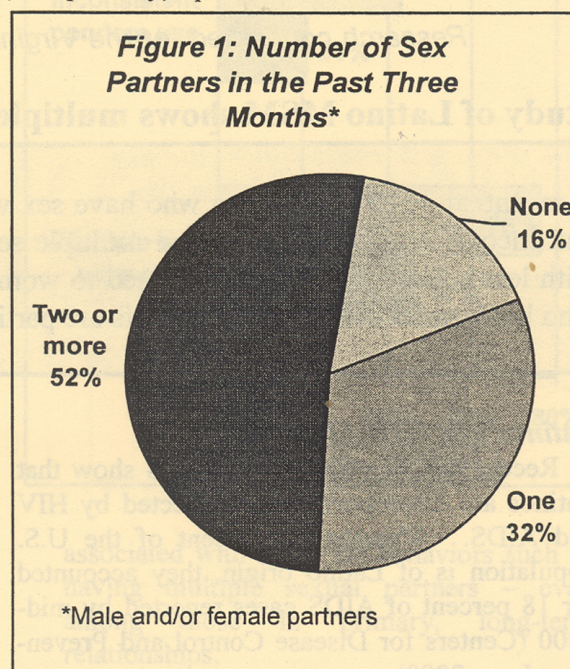
Risk Factors for HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS risk factors used in this study are having multiple sex partners during the three

months prior to the survey and not always using condoms during anal sex with men.

Multiple sex partners -- While about half of the men reported they were in a long-term, primary relationship, nearly all with a man, 43% reported that these relationships were not monogamous.

The most common meeting places for casual (non-primary) partners for the first time



were bars/night clubs (71%), private parties (45%), or through a friend or acquaintance (43%). Public locations, such as parks, restrooms, the street and other "cruising" areas were named by 37%.

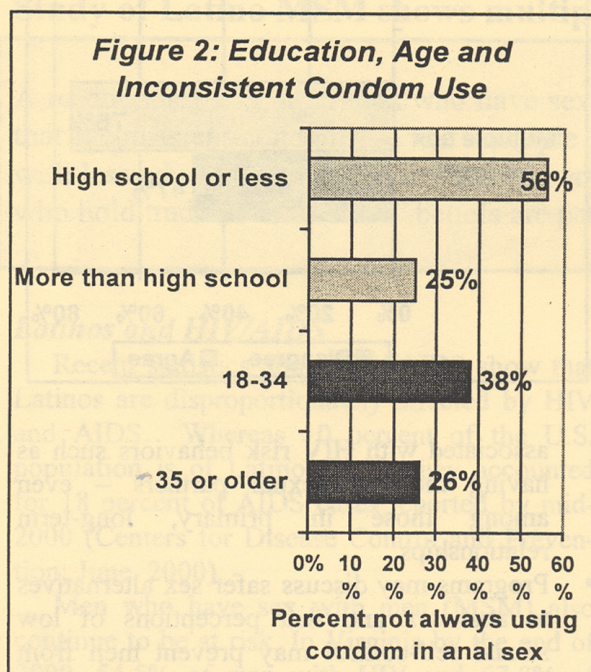
In general, men who reported sex with a man outside their primary relationship engaged in both oral and anal sex, in both receptive and insertive roles. Ninety-seven percent said they had received oral sex; 84% said they had given oral sex; 81% said they had been the inserting partner in anal sex; 68% said they had been the receiving partner in anal sex. Forty-three percent said they did not know the HIV status of the men with whom they had casual sex.

Condom Use -- Condom use was infrequent for oral sex and not consistent for anal sex. More than half said that in oral sex, neither they nor their partners used a condom. More than a third of those who engaged in anal sex said they did not always use a condom in either role.

Predicting risk

Younger and less educated men are clearly more likely to report inconsistent condom use. Figure 2 shows that 56% of men with high school education or less reported inconsistent condom use compared to 25% of men with more education. Thirty-eight percent of men under 35 reported not always using a condom in anal sex, compared to 26% of men 35 and older.

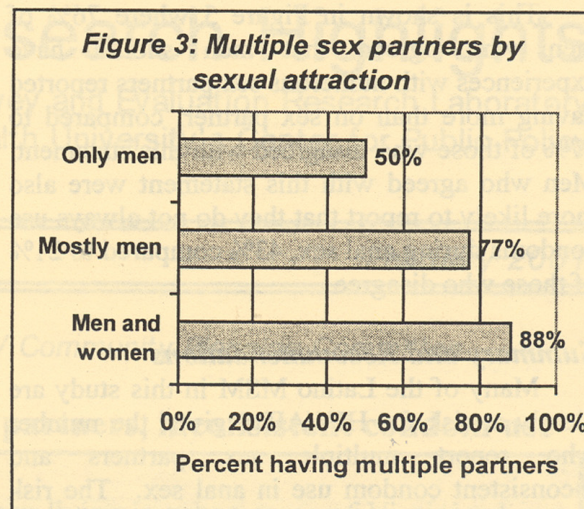
In addition, 78% of men under 25 reported multiple sex partners, compared to 59% of men older than 25.



A bisexual identity and attraction to both men and women or mostly women also predicted having multiple sex partners. Of men attracted to both men and women or mostly women, about 88% said they had multiple sex partners compared to 77% of those who were attracted mostly to men and 50% of those attracted only to men. This is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 4 shows that bisexuals are by far the most likely to report more than one sex partner in the previous three months, 87% compared to 58% of the straight-identified men and 53% of the gay-identified men.

Of the men who said they were attracted only or mostly to men, only about a third reported inconsistent condom use, compared to 70% of men who were attracted to both men and women equally or mostly to women.



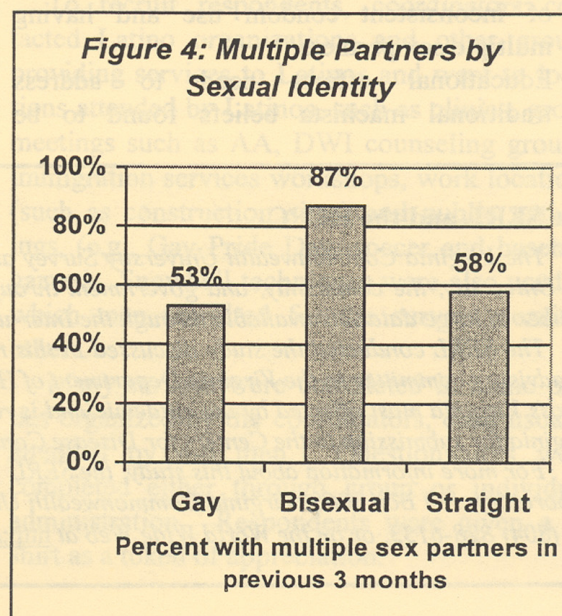
Machismo

An important trait of Latino culture is *machismo*, which includes the beliefs, among others, that men should have many sexual conquests and that it is acceptable to have sexual activity outside their primary relationships.

These behaviors are justified by the belief that men have difficulty controlling their sexual "urges."

In fact 40% of the MSM in this study said that anal sex is the most important form of sex (during sex with men), and 52% said they have poor control over their sexual impulses.

Such *machista* beliefs are strongly associated with HIV/AIDS risk factors.



This is shown in Figure 5 where 76% of men who agreed that men should have experiences with numerous sex partners reported having more than one sex partner, compared to 47% of those who disagreed with this statement. Men who agreed with this statement were also more likely to report that they do not always use condoms during anal sex, 43% compared to 21% of those who disagree.

Summary and Recommendations

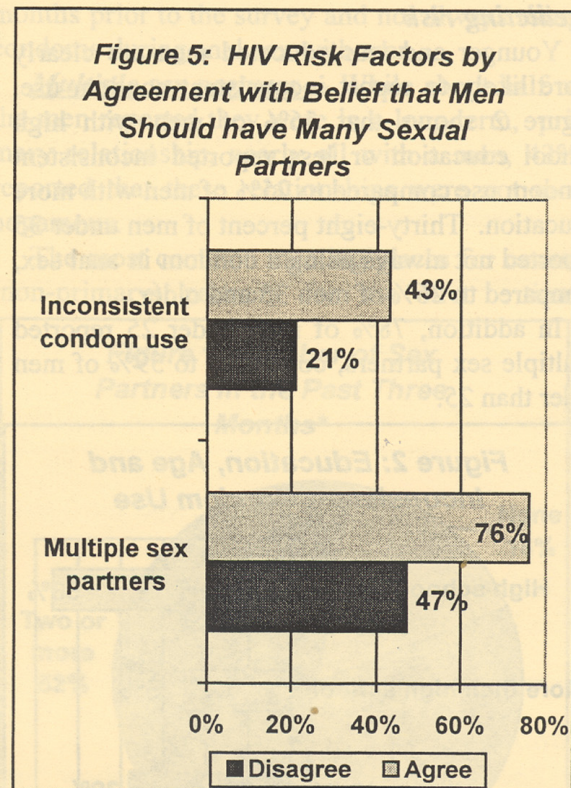
Many of the Latino MSM in this study are clearly at risk for HIV/AIDS given the number who report multiple sex partners and inconsistent condom use in anal sex. The risk factors are most prevalent among younger and less educated men.

Beyond this, men who report attraction to women and self-identify as heterosexuals (even though they report sex with men) and who are bisexual report more risky behavior, particularly sex with multiple partners.

Men holding strong *machismo* beliefs are also more likely to have multiple sex partners and to use condoms inconsistently in anal sex.

As a result the following recommendations can be made concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and education efforts with this population:

- HIV prevention interventions need to target the less educated and young Latino MSM as they may be at increased HIV risk because of inconsistent condom use and having multiple sex partners.
- Educational efforts need to address traditional machista beliefs found to be



associated with HIV risk behaviors such as having multiple sexual partners – even among those in primary, long-term relationships.

- Programs may discuss safer sex alternatives to anal sex and that perceptions of low sexual self-control may prevent men from using condoms.
- Educational efforts should acknowledge the HIV risk of bisexual behavior, both to the man and his male and female partners.

The SERL and the HCPC

The Virginia Commonwealth University Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory, founded in 1982, serves the University, the community, and government through some 100 projects annually. The SERL also manages a number of large data sets available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.

The SERL conducted the study discussed in this report for the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee, an advisory committee to the Virginia Department of Health. The HCPC includes representatives from communities across Virginia most affected by the epidemic and is responsible for developing an annual HIV prevention plan for Virginia for submission to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information about this study, the SERL, or the HCPC, contact: VCU Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory, PO Box 3065, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284-3065, phone (804) 828-8813, fax (804) 828-6133, or on the World Wide Web at <http://www.vcu.edu/srl>.